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THE MEDIA**The Good Old Ways**

It takes a special kind of courage—or foolhardiness—to start a general-interest magazine these days. To revive one that has already collapsed in spectacular fashion would seem to be tempting fate. But Beurt SerVaas, a freewheeling businessman from Indianapolis, has done it anyway. And to the surprise of many magazine pros, he has turned the reborn Saturday Evening Post into a modest success.

What makes the revival even more surprising is that SerVaas is purveying the same inventory of Rockwellian nostalgia, upbeat stories and peace-and-quiet humor that helped lead the magazine to oblivion the first time around. The new Saturday Evening Post, which appears quarterly, is chock-a-block full of golden oldies, including Tugboat Annie and Ted Key cartoons, plus such topical throwaways as "Pat Nixon Was My Typing Teacher." About the only up-to-date feature of the magazine is its price, a steep \$1 per copy. But there appear to be customers aplenty. The first two issues sold out their 500,000-copy press runs, and for the current issue the run has been increased to 550,000. Advertising dropped sharply with the second issue ("because no one in the world thought we'd ever print a second issue," explains SerVaas) but it bounced right back with the third.

Butt: The SerVaas publishing style is as unorthodox as the Post's content. For one thing, it is largely a family affair. SerVaas's wife, Cory, who has a medical degree and no previous experience in the general-interest magazine field, serves as executive editor of the Post and writes its "Medical Mailbox" column; she also doubles as executive editor of Holiday, another relic of the Curtis Publishing Co. empire. The SerVaases' daughter Kris, a Wellesley sophomore, edited an excerpt from the writings of de Tocqueville for one issue of the Post. And a niece, Sandra SerVaas, recently treated Holiday readers to an account of her trip to Japan. SerVaas also startled the magazine industry by setting up shop in Indianapolis after failing to get his operation off the ground in New York City. "Nobody with talent would work for me in New York," he recalls. "We were the butt of every joke and eventually were ridden out of town. We brought the poor hulk out here like the Revolutionary Army licking its wounds. We've been mauled and bruised by the East."

SerVaas, a onetime associate of Wall Street lion Serge Rubinstein, now works in the electroplating and forging

industries, became the last president of Curtis Publishing in early 1970, acquiring 17 per cent of its stock. At the time, the Post alone was faced with claims for \$20 million in back taxes, another \$20 million in unpaid debts and \$400 million in libel suits. SerVaas quickly settled all claims and paid for them by selling off the company's printing plant, tree farms, paper mills and its book and circulation divisions. That left him in control of the Post, Holiday and Jack and Jill, a children's magazine.

The resurrected Saturday Evening Post may not be out of the woods yet, but SerVaas is optimistic. He plans to switch to a bimonthly publishing sched-



The Post: Something old, something new

ule late next year and hopes that two years from now the Post will become a monthly. That may call for a few alterations in the magazine's approach. "It's inevitable that the nostalgia will be phased out," says managing editor Frederic Birmingham, a former managing editor of Esquire. But the Post will probably continue to be a magazine that celebrates American life. "The Post is a patriotic magazine without being 100 per cent American," says SerVaas. "I believe in enlightened patriotism. We can represent that feeling again, just as the old Post did so many years ago."

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